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226 The first sign of a fish floating stupefied to the top was greeted with shrieks of excitement. Men waded down into the stream and [227 462] pronged each fish as it appeared with their fine barbed spears (*ukuela*) while the women caught them in baskets as they floated by. The men admitted that the women's method was more efficient but added, 'We men must not take fish like the women do. *Our* work is to spike the fish with spears.' Most of the village company returned to the village in the afternoon with eight fish of about 1½ lb. between them, but laughing and contented with the day.

More serious *ububa* expeditions are made on the bigger rivers when temporary weirs are put up across a bend in the stream and fish traps set in these to prevent any stupefied fish being carried down the river. The fishers catch what they can with spears and baskets by day, and return next morning to look at the traps. In the valuable fishing pools near the Chambesi the territorial chief organizes fishing drives. Children use poison in tiny rivulets and catch small fish in them with traps.

226 227 2. *Fish traps.* The second common method of fishing is by trapping. Fish traps are set on the banks of flooded rivers with their mouths towards the stream to catch the fish when they leave the main body of the water in the breeding season, or reversed in the opposite direction to trap the young fish returning from the breeding places to the parent stream. They may also be set in specially constructed dikes or weirs. Trapping is the work of men alone.

The traps (*mono*, plur. *miona*) are of the simplest possible construction and similar to those commonly used by Bantu people, both in Central and South Africa. They consist of reed cones, either with an open end or with a circular disk with a hole in the centre plaited into the aperture to act as a kind of valve to prevent the escape of fish that have been sucked into the cone by the force of the current.

The different types include the tiny traps used by children, about two feet long and five inches in diameter (*tinto*), made by soaking split reeds in the stream for a day or so, tying them at one end, and plaiting them together with bark strands at intervals of about four inches in order to form a flexible cone which remains taut when the open end is fixed between two sticks (cf. diagram 1). They can only be used when the floods are beginning in February and March, and are set overnight by the boys whenever they can find some small eddying current among the grasses on the bank of a stream. They are also used by the girls in the dry weather, in

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September, to catch small fish in rivulets sunk to about two feet wide on miniature fish-poisoning expeditions.

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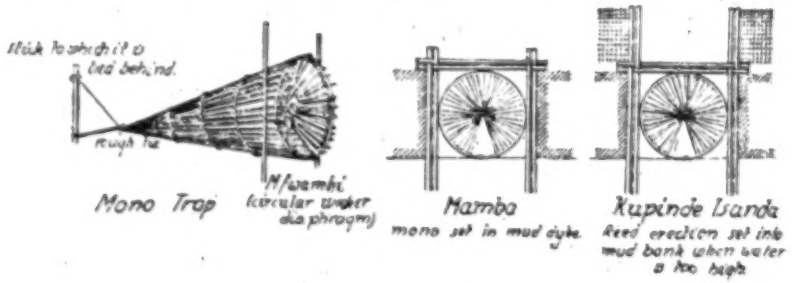


(1) (2) (3)

The *mono* proper is between three or four feet long and about one and a half feet in diameter at the widest end which is closed with a valve (*mfwambi*). These traps are made of stouter reeds and must be more securely fixed by means of upright stakes at both ends (diagram 1), and the aperture sometimes concealed by grasses. These traps are set in reeds at the edge of some backwater or in small ditches in flooded flats. They are put out overnight and visited each morning. If any fish have been caught, the apex of the cone is simply untied and emptied out.

Any one can make a *mono* of this kind in a morning and set it where he pleases. But in fact the supply caught by this method is not a large one. They can only be set for a short period at the beginning of the floods and at the end. When the waters are rising swiftly they would be washed away.

3. *Traps set in dikes and weirs* (*ubwamba*, plur. *mamba*). A more serious method of fishing, and one practised only on the big rivers like the Chambesi, is to set the *mono* traps, in dikes (*amamba*) built about one and a half to two feet high of mud and grass sods, either parallel to the river banks, or else across tributary streams or backwaters near their junction with the main river.[1] The *mono* are set in gaps in the mud wall firmly held with wooden uprights and transverse rods (cf. diagram 3), and when the water has become too high in a backwater a reed construction is sometimes built on top of the mud bank to support the trap at a higher level (*ukupinde isande*).

[1] The big mud dikes built across the Chambesi flats near Molema were opened on 3 April 1933, and on the neighbouring backwaters in May.

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[facing p. 334]



A trap set in a mud dike.



A Bemba fish trap.



Net-fishing in the Kalungu River—a small boy holds the bundle of net that is to be stretched across the river.

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226 227 *Mamba* are used (*a*) in backwaters of big rivers (*ifishiba*) in March; (*b*) on the flats about 400 feet from the river edge as the waters fall in April and May; (*c*) in the same dikes, with the traps reversed to catch the fish as they leave the main stream to breed in January, if the rain is not so heavy that it sweeps them away at once (*ukucilule mbelo*); (*d*) in the main body of the stream (*umulongo*) in May, in small rivers only.

Large numbers of fish are only caught by the trap method near the big rivers, but a sufficient number of small fish are picked up by the banks of streams to make a welcome variety in the diet.

4. *Weirs* (*icansa*, plur. *ifyansa*). *Mono* traps may also be set in weirs made of sticks and reeds placed across the big streams where there is a certain amount of current driving the fish into the traps (*uku milongo* or *ku mukuku*). These weirs include: (*a*) the permanent variety, such as are found on the Chambesi River in November and December; (*b*) semi-permanent weirs built to last for three years or so, or until the sand sifts up by the current; (*c*) temporary weirs built hurriedly to block up the current in a big river for a fish poisoning expedition, in which case traps are used. A much bigger variety of *mono* traps, about eight feet long and three feet in diameter, known as *banasabila* or *mumange* are used.[1] These weirs are in use in November and December until the crocodiles become a menace to the fishers. Thus the season is limited, but the method is very simple, and many of the larger varieties of fish are caught.

226 [84] 227 286 5. *Nets* (*amasumbu*). In the main body of a river natives catch fish by nets. Unlike the Bisa, who make about eleven different types of fishing net, the Bemba maintain that they only use one, with the occasional addition of small accessory nets (*akalenge*). The nets are made of twisted bark rope (*ulushishi*). The maker first digs up the roots of the *lwimbi* bush and hammers these out, removing the internal fibres. These he dries and then damps again, and finally frays off fine threads which are rolled together between finger and thumb into a very thin string. This latter is rolled on to a ball and used with a wooden threader to tat the net. [435] It is said to take about three months to make a complete net, which is then four feet deep and twenty-five yards long, and sold for about three shillings. Nets are individually owned, and belong to men only.

226 227 The usual method of net fishing is known as *ukusoa*, the word

[1] I saw these used on the Luansenshi and Chambesi.

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used for driving animals into a hunting net, and the process is in fact very similar. When the waters in the big rivers are low, either in September and October at the beginning of the rains, or in January and February at the end, the nets are stretched across the stream attached to grasses on either bank and kept up by a line of wooden floats (*mpepa*). They hang about three feet below the surface caught down to the bottom with stakes driven in by the foot if the stream is low. On a big river the fisherman, and one or two companions, sets the net and then paddles off down the bank in his canoe for about five hundred yards, turns, and then beats the water up to the net with sticks and shouting. The fish are driven into the net and either entangled in its meshes and pulled out by hand or else speared. The fishers then circle round and drive the opposite side of the net. On the bigger rivers this is a specialist activity, and two or three men set the nets together with a serious concentration of manner. They go out daily and bring back a dozen fish or so for eating or drying. In November big fishing drives are organized by the chief *Nkule* in the fishing pools over which he has rights. But in the smaller rivers (e.g. the Kalungu) I have seen young men playing at net setting in the same light-hearted spirit as that of the *ububa* fishers.

Other types of net-fishing are as follows:

(*a*) Setting the nets overnight (*ukutea ndala*), a method only suitable when the water has not fallen too low (July–October), and in still waters such as the backwaters (*ifishiba*) of the Chambesi near Molema, where neither currents nor crocodiles would sweep away the fish entangled in the nets before morning.

(*b*) Torch fishing (*ukusoe cenga*). This is a method practised in big rivers in December and January, i.e. when the waters are high. The fishers go out in threes and fours carrying flaming torches on the bows of their canoes specially lined with clay for the purpose. The fish come to the top, dazzled by the light, and are speared over the edge of the canoe or driven into the nets.[1]

(*c*) Beating the fish into small nets about one and a half feet long, deep set across flats to catch the fish, leaving the rivers to spawn, i.e. December and January. When the waters stand about three feet high on the flats, men and boys go out in bands, and drive the fish on foot, killing them with sticks or spears (*ukuela*). It will be seen that in the big rivers and their tributaries and

[1] I have only heard this activity described.

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backwaters nets can be set by one method or another practically throughout the year.

*Other methods.* The Bemba also fish with hooks (*amaloba*) baited with fish and slung on a rope across a big stream, when the waters are low in August, but I never saw this done. Younger men say this method was introduced by the white people since they know that fish hooks are now only to be obtained at European stores. Older fishermen told me that, on the contrary, this type of fishing was practised from the earliest times, and that the Bemba 'always' knew how to make rough iron hooks for the purpose.

A few fish are said to be caught on the Chambesi flats when the floods are falling by means of plaited screens of grass (*uluangwa*) by which the women cut off small fish from the stream, but, indeed, when the waters are drying up at this season odd fish are caught here and there in all sorts of ways. I have often seen casual passers-by step off a raised pathway through fields flooded to a depth of six inches and catch fish of about ½ lb. to 1 lb. in their hands in the grasses, or else spear them (*ukumela*).

To summarize, it can be said that the Bemba who live near the smaller streams of the district are for the most part unskilled fishermen, and rely on the low waters of dried up rivers, and flooded banks to catch a few fish at certain months of the year, but never get sufficient to dry or trade. They have no organized system of exploiting the resources of the rivers or definite leadership in this activity, but catch whatever they can during the breeding season, or before the fish are full grown.[1] In the regular fishing villages, on the other hand, the activity is almost continuous throughout the year. There are four or five different methods of fishing practised, and the men are universally employed in this pursuit. They value their reputation as skilled fishermen and know a considerable amount about the different types of fish caught. Though there is not sufficient fish caught to permit of regular trading, yet it is quite common for a man to be able to pay his 10s. tax by sporadic sales of dried fish.

6. *Fishing rights and ceremonies.* Fishing rights, like the rules of use of land, cannot be considered apart from the peoples' beliefs as to the spiritual ownership of food resources. The produce of

[1] How far the people are destroying their supplies of fish by this means does not yet seem clear. Cf. Report on the fish of Lake Bangweolu by C. K. Ricardo and R. J. Jones, December 1936.